

VICTORY OVER VIOLENCE 2001
CHERISHING YOUNG PEOPLE CREATES A NEW FUTURE
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‘Cherishing the sanctity of human life!’ Darin Nellis says. ‘This is the heart and soul of what is meant by Victory Over Violence and the mentor–disciple relationship.’

In my last article, on “The Next Steps for Victory Over Violence” (March 23 *World Tribune*), I wrote about the alarming increase in youth-on-youth violence and the significance of the mentor–disciple relationship in addressing this. In particular, it is the example of SGI President Ikeda’s compassionate actions to care deeply for others that I think can help us in addressing the underlying causes of youth violence.

Describing the purpose of the VOV campaign in his latest education proposal, President Ikeda says: “This movement is conducted through promoting dialogue to disseminate the spirit of nonviolence. The overarching goal is to transform the tendency to downplay the sanctity of life that became deeply rooted in the minds of our children during the twentieth century, the century of war and violence. The VOV movement is developing broadly in U.S. society and receiving support from many human rights organizations, schools, and other educational institutions. Above all, it has become a tremendous source of hope and courage for young people who have suffered the effects of violence” (February *Living Buddhism*, p. 26).

Cherishing the sanctity of human life—this is the heart and soul of what is meant by Victory Over Violence and the mentor–disciple relationship. So how can we “transform the tendency to downplay the sanctity of life” and cherish the lives of young people, especially for those who show signs of some of the common risk factors for violent behavior, i.e., weak social ties, antisocial behavior, delinquent peers and poor parent–child relations? Even if we have good intentions, are we guaranteed that a troubled young person will listen to us?

For the past five years this question has been a particularly painful concern of mine. Five years ago, my younger brother graduated high school. He seemed to be marked with the promise of future success. He was an all-star athlete and a good student. He was also the prince at his prom.

However, after he graduated he did not know what to do with himself, had little hope for the future and had a strong aversion to speaking with or being around his family. Sound familiar?

It got worse. Over the following five years, he fell into a deep depression and did a lot of drugs, avoided his family like the plague and even contemplated suicide several times. He was diagnosed with schizophrenia, and we had to force him to receive treatment and live in a locked facility. This experience tore my heart to shreds.

No matter what tactic I took, he would not be honest with me or speak to me at any length. I was extremely frustrated. I chanted and chanted and chanted until I was blue in the face.

When I did have the courage to face my younger brother, he would completely disrespect me, curse me and even hit me. It took a long time before I could get over my anger at his insensitivity.

We need to have unconditional love for young people.

I thought again about how President Ikeda had been able to reach the hearts of generations of youth to build the SGI into the great organization it is today. I was particularly inspired by the following passage written by President Ikeda in *Learning from the Goshō: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*: “Because Shakyamuni loved people, many gathered around him, drawn by his thoroughly human conduct. And, naturally, the atmosphere around him was always lively and bright. The same was true of the Daishonin. In his presence, people doubtless felt free to voice their innermost thoughts and feelings.

“Nichiren Daishonin was of course a strict mentor and teacher. But at the same time, from his many letters, we can see that people felt absolute assurance in confiding in him. He knew everything about them. In the Daishonin’s presence, even adults would become as honest and open as children. Almost without realizing it, they would reveal their genuine, unaffected selves, their true faces” (p. 144).

I realized that President Ikeda must know how Shakyamuni and the Daishonin loved people because he also truly loves people. This is the love I have so often felt from President Ikeda in his guidance and when I recently visited Japan on a training trip.

I realized that if I were to help my brother, I would have to deepen my love for him and for other people. I needed to learn how to become more compassionate, more caring.

But what would I do if, despite my continued efforts, he kept rejecting me? Again, I was reminded of something President Ikeda had once said: “Friendship is not simply a matter of the other person liking you and caring about your welfare. Nor is true friendship conditional, lasting only as long as the other person does not betray you or let you down. It is your concern and feelings for the other person that make a friendship. Friendship is never betraying a friend, even if he or she should betray you. Being friends with someone while they’re experiencing good times but deserting them when they experience hard times cannot be called true friendship. Genuine friends have the courage to stick by a friend in even the worst situation, when everyone else has turned against him or her” (March 9 *World Tribune*, p. 6).

I realized that it did not matter what my brother did. What mattered was my attitude to continue to show him my love and not give up, no matter what happened.

The universal values of Buddhism can be shared through VOV.

My challenges with my brother have given me the opportunity to deeply self-reflect and expand my capacity to care for others without any expectations. After five years of pain and struggle to understand why I was in this situation and could not seem to change it, I feel a profound sense of appreciation for my brother’s existence. My life has grown beyond what I could have imagined just five years ago.

Even more important, my brother has grown. He is now beginning to open up again to his family, he calls and visits his mother and he has a wonderful girlfriend who he is now moving in with. I cannot describe the amount of joy and appreciation I have for the practice of Buddhism and my mentor, Daisaku Ikeda, who guided me through every painful step of this experience.

VOV is our campaign to share universal Buddhist values, which we cherish so deeply, with people throughout the world. In my experience about learning how to cherish my brother’s life, I touched on a few of these values: compassion, reverence for life, courage and interdependence.

As we gear up for our Youth Family Festivals around the country this summer, I hope we can all take “The Next Steps for Victory Over Violence” by deepening our own capacity to care for others and to reach out to one young person who is suffering.

Coming up next in this series: “The Mentor–Disciple Relationship and Mastering the Art of Dialogue.”

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